

# ABOUT MUSIC

– By Mariss McTucker

## Ben Bullington:

### Lazy Moon

Recorded by Fred Baker at Electric Peak Recording, Gardiner, MT, mastered by Jim De Main at Yes Master, Nashville, produced by Ben Bullington, 2012.

Livingston physician and guitar-player Ben Bullington has released his fourth CD of “vintage” Americana music – what he describes as “string band music with a modern feel.”

The pieces sound like they’ve been around a long time. The songwriter wanted to record songs centered on Montana and the West, and the atmosphere is perfect.

Bullington has plenty of help on this well-produced album. The group includes noted pickers John Lowell on flat-top and resophonic guitars and Tom Murphy on mandolin, with a host of other instrumentalists, and back-up vocalists Tracy Nelson and Joanne Gardner.

The title song, “Lazy Moon,” is a gentle bluegrass loper, with banjo nuances from Bruce Stanger. Nice harmony vocals add to the western feel of the moody, ethereal “Candle in the Window.” It’s dirge-like and atmospheric, a tale of loneliness.

The waltz, “Montana Girl,” is a paean to a loved one (“a smile at the ready, like the first day of summer”). “I Didn’t See You, Maggie” features a soft cello accompaniment by Molly Glazer, and “Lone Pine” is a slow, bluesy waltz, wherein Bullington makes good use of descriptions (“W. H. Auden is lying open face-down; a Miles Davis solo is floatin’ around”).

“Cup of Strong Black Coffee” finds Bullington’s paternal side coming to the fore. The toe-tapper offers an admonishment to his son to tread carefully with the woman he’s with, and be sure of what he wants. It sports a nice mandolin break by Tom Murphy.

Bullington’s penchant for setting the scene is further apparent in “Sage After Rain,” the story of a beer-drinking buddy with a sad tale of a lost love (“an old Royal typewriter on a desk by a window ...” and “... the smell of her skin, like sage after rain”). The mesmerizing refrain is repeated twice, with back-up vocals. Cool!

The hilarious “I Despise Flies” has a spooky tinge, underpinned by reverb-heavy resophonic guitar from Lowell. In the song, Bullington recounts his hatred for the housefly (“... But I have no admiration as the maddenin’ buzz I hear, meets with sudden silence when it drops into my beer”). Bullington has a lazy, scratchy sustained wail in his voice when he says “despise.” I love it! That’s a western gem if I ever heard one – something we can all relate to.

The final cut is a love song to his adopted hometown. “Livingston” pays homage to beer halls, fishin’ and hangin’ out with friends, helping them through their trials. It’s what Bullington calls “a stomper final track,” and features extra musicians, “the Livingston Misfits.”

Bullington is thankful to them all, and for his ability to entertain while he battles declining health. It’s obvious he’s inspired.

Visit [www.benbullington.com](http://www.benbullington.com).

## Uncharted Waters:

### Conspiracy

Engineered, mixed, and mastered by Dan Nichols at Soul Tree Studio, Helena, MT, produced by Uncharted Waters, 2012.

On their new album, guitarist and singer John Chart and cohorts rock us with some snappin’, jazzy blues. The rest of the Helena musicians, who’ve played together in various configurations over the years, are John Moore on bass, keys and vocals; noted producer Dan Nichols on drums and percussion, and Michael Kakuk on harmonica and saxes. Guest stars Sarah Elkins and Erin Powers share backing vocals, and Jesse Frohreich raps a bit on one track.

Chart and Moore trade originals. They are influenced in part by the Grateful Dead, Van the Man, and the soulful Delbert McClinton. I hear a bit of Delbert right away on the first tune, the harmonica-laced “Get Up and Dance.” The gals add the Dan Hicks infusion of smooth “ah-h-hs” to this one. You best be gettin’ on the dance floor if your feet have any say.

On Moore’s “Sky Cap,” he tells his troubled woman to move on. (“She had a problem with men so the problem was mine ... you got your bad luck bundled in your old backpack ... you got your tears in a vanity case.”)

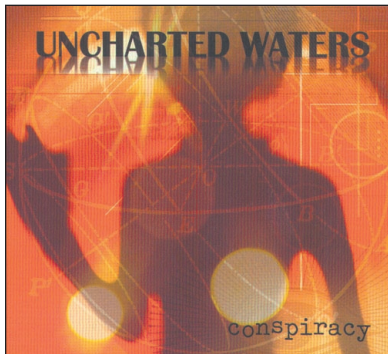
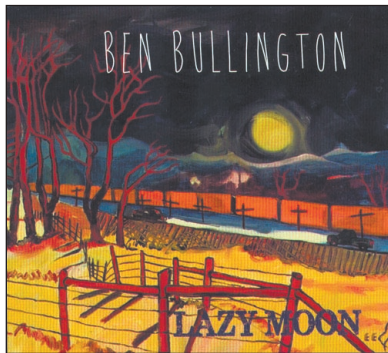
Chart’s “Montana Funky” is packed with the sound of wah-wah guitar effects and laid-back chords, for a moody R&B feel. And John and Abe Moore’s “Green Card” is sunny and upbeat, a tongue-in-cheek take on medical marijuana. Ha!

“Livin’ in the Burbs” honks with barry sax and bent guitar licks, and the title tune, “Conspiracy,” gets down and dirty with musky, thick guitar chords that mingle with black helicopter talk and other paranoia-inducing lyrics.

“Snap Decision” shines with ultra-tight trap work and a syncopated jive, and Nichols shares writing duties on “See You When I’m Gone,” with its splashy Atlanta Rhythm Section nuances.

“Obsession” is spooky and kind of creepy. No, he’s not really stalking her!? It’s got a shoulder-shakin’ rhythm, great guitar and Moore’s bluesy keyboard work. “What am I gonna do, what am I gonna do” — the words rush out in a torrent. “Obsession. Confession.” Cool!

A fine effort from some long-time pickers and singers. And as always, spot-on production from Nichols.



## Brent Poe McCabe:

### Evocación

Produced by Brent Poe McCabe, engineered by Gil Stober, Peak Recording and Sound, Bozeman, MT, 2012.

Dillon classical guitarist and educator Brent Poe McCabe has put out his third CD, and it’s filled with 11 compositions by some of the genre’s masters.

The Juilliard-trained, UM Western music professor is a critically acclaimed artist, having performed on this continent and abroad. He’s received many awards for his playing and taught oodles of music courses, and shows his versatility here in a solo compendium of styles.

The album starts with a composition by Brazilian composer João Pernambuco, titled, “Sons de Carrilhões.” It’s a dance called a chôromaxixe, and has a plucky, recognizable melody that McCabe sails through. The second piece, “Estudio No. 18,” by the neo-classical Cuban guitarist and avant-garde performer Leo Brouwer, constructs twittery patterns, cascading and building to the theme. McCabe’s fingers flutter like a bird’s. Delightful!

Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz gives us “Mallorca,” a Barcarolle, or boat song, replete with bass notes and arpeggios playing off them, in a pretty dissonance. McCabe shows his brilliant technique on this one, effortlessly executing the intricate guitar patterns while retaining the piece’s majesty.

The next three works are waltzes written by Venezuelan guitarist Antonio Lauro. “Natalia” swirls and sways, its exotic rhythms propelling the song along. “Andreina” is the same ilk – we feel like sashaying around the ballroom, while McCabe chords and strokes the strings to the lively dance beat. “El Marabino” is a bit more complicated yet also very danceable.

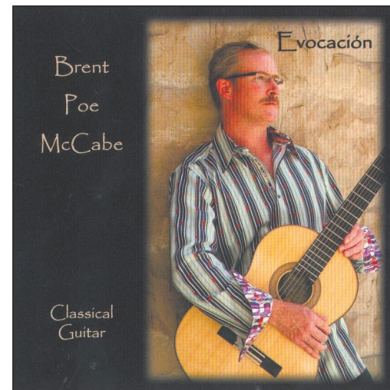
“Study No. 20 op. 31,” by Spanish composer Fernando Sor, is moody, stoic and soulful. It rolls and roils as McCabe plays fluidly and cleanly finger-picks the melody.

The rushing notes of Albéniz’ “Asturias” greet us next, ominous and thrilling; we expect the dancers with castanets to appear at any moment. It’s a long, riveting piece that finally draws a tranquil breath, wherein McCabe plays octave notes in unison, before building once again and exiting softly. Whew! A terrific performance.

Next up is a strident, loving tribute to McCabe’s instrument, aptly titled “Serenado por Gitaro,” by Lou Harrison. Written in 1952, it sounds distinctly modern. The finale is Brouwer’s dreamy “Cancion de Cuna,” a lullaby that tiptoes in and sweetly regales us before it leaves.

All in all, this is a well-produced collection of expertly played melodies by a very accomplished performer. Pick this one up to lighten the doldrums of these gray days.

Visit the artist at [www.brentpoemccabe.com](http://www.brentpoemccabe.com).



## Megan Makeever:

### Unstoppable

Recorded, mixed, and mastered by Gil Stober at Peak Recording and Sound, Bozeman, MT, produced by Megan Makeever and Gil Stober, 2010.

Young Bozeman songwriter Megan Makeever’s latest CD is her third at the tender age of 22. The college grad in musical performance has crafted 12 originals here, in which she conversationally explores the beauty and heartbreak of young love – musical dialogs, if you will.

She mostly plays solo, backing her songs alternately on piano and guitar. She has accompaniment on some songs by viola, cello and violin (Avery Ballotta, Zach and Hayden Kroff, Jared Wiley and Morgan Saboda).

Makeever possesses an accomplished vocal delivery, navigating between her higher and lower registers, sometimes breathlessly, with ease. I hear traces of singers like Alicia Keys in her style, but without all the fireworks. It’s a relief.

She explores the intricacies of unrequited love in the wistful, aching, “One More Time,” a pretty waltz with piano (“Just ask me to dance one more time, and I promise I’ll let go ...”).

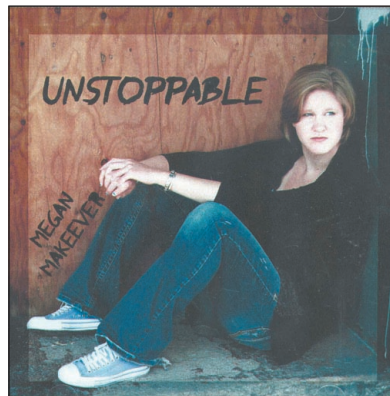
“Outspoken Ego” finds Makeever scorching a lover for immaturity; it’s a slow, bluesy rocker with pouncing piano chords (“I’m not your doormat, I won’t let you walk all over me ...”).

In “All or Nothing,” our heroine lays her feelings out there. Her piano playing perfectly complements the lyrics, building and falling with the emotion in the song.

“Please Come Home” has soft guitar, accompanied by understated cello and viola, and a surprise vocal duet with noted Bozeman jazz artist Jake Koelzer. “Take A Look” is slow and sad, where she stretches into her higher range on the lyric, the string section playing off the melodic line, piano arpeggios abounding. It’s got a classical nuance, sweetly strident.

“Bliss” has a simple and hypnotic guitar riff, well placed behind the reams of clever lyrics, hypnotizing us like a mantra. The rousing last tune, “Gotta Quit Forgivin’ You,” features guest vocalist, Jeni Fleming and musicians Jake Fleming, Kelly Roberti, Leif Routman and Levi Kujala.

There’s more good stuff here, clean and polished. Check it out at [www.meganmakeever.com](http://www.meganmakeever.com).



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## State of the Arts welcomes CDs

State of the Arts welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or Lively Times, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.